

Remarks at the National Italian-American Foundation Dinner
October 21, 1995

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Frank Guarini, for that wonderful introduction. Chairman Frank Stella, Vice Chairman Art Gajarsa, Senator Domenici—always does a good job at these dinners. I must say I was delighted this was not one of those annual roasts, because otherwise I would have been the object of his wonderful humor. *[Laughter]* I am delighted to be here with you and with all the Members of Congress tonight. To the Most Reverend Cacciavillan, the Ambassador from the Holy See; the Italian Ambassador, Ambassador Biancheri; to the Foreign Minister of Italy, Foreign Minister Agnelli, I'm delighted to see you here tonight. And I want to say a special word of thanks on behalf of the United States to our Ambassador to Italy, Reginald Bartholomew, for what a fine job he has done. To all the board members and friends of the foundation, some of whom—hundreds, indeed, of whom have come here tonight from Italy, I am deeply honored to be with you tonight for the fourth time in a row on the occasion of your 20th dinner. And I would like to say one thing to the Italians here present, beginning with the Foreign Minister.

Last year I came to this dinner direct from a trip to the Middle East and a signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. In the last year, in many ways the world has moved closer to peace in Northern Ireland and Haiti, another signal event on the road to peace in the Middle East. And by the grace of God, we will continue the road to peace, beginning on October 31st, when the leaders of all the countries involved in the conflict in Bosnia meet in the United States in Ohio. If we are able to make a peace and enforce it, I want all my fellow Americans to know that it would not have been possible but for the strong and firm leadership and involvement of Italy. And I am very grateful for what they have done to bring about peace in Bosnia.

I know a lot of your honorees. Last Monday, I was in Los Angeles with Tony Bennett, who was the headliner for a wonderful concert put together as a benefit for the Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. Just a couple of days ago, Joe Montana and

his lovely wife and their four wonderful children and some of their friends came to the White House. And as their children were examining—I think that's the appropriate word, examining—everything in the Oval Office, I thought to myself, now, there are real family values. And since we're—I have to say, since this event is held in Washington, DC, and given all that's going on here in Washington, I think it's quite appropriate that you're honoring on the same night Joe Montana and John Travolta, because what's going on here reminds me of a cross between a pro football game and "Pulp Fiction" half the time. *[Laughter]*

Earlier this month, I was with Cardinal Bevilacqua when I had the great honor to welcome His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Newark, New Jersey. It was our third meeting since I've been President. I don't want to commit heresy here, and I'm not a Roman Catholic, but there are some important parallels between the Holy Father's career and mine. *[Laughter]* He came from Poland to the Vatican; I came from Arkansas to the White House. *[Laughter]* We were both outsiders who got jobs that usually go to insiders. *[Laughter]* And sometime in 1993 or early '94 or so, I saw the obvious, that he seemed to be doing better than I was. *[Laughter]* And I searched for the reasons why, and I realized it was because he had named an Italian chief of staff. By blind coincidence, about 30 minutes after that light dawned in my brain, Leon Panetta walked in for a meeting, and that's how he got the job. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank all the Italian-Americans who are active in this administration: the Ambassador; Mr. Panetta; Laura D'Andrea Tyson; Pat Griffin, the head of our Congressional Liaison; the Director of the FBI, Louis Freeh; Bob Balancato, the executive director of our conference on aging. And one person I want to mention especially tonight who doesn't get mentioned enough, Marilyn DiGiacobbe, who did such a wonderful job of coordinating for us during the Pope's visit and tonight and so many other times.

These people have done a lot to help our administration move our country forward and do the things that Frank Guarini was kind

enough to mention. I want to thank this organization for the support that you have given us in our common efforts to move this country forward.

I love to come to this dinner for a lot of reasons. There are always a lot of laughs. There are always a lot of distinguished people here. I always learn a lot. But most importantly, I think it's important that the President acknowledge that Italian-Americans have given us a model, all of us, for valuing our families, caring for our communities, celebrating our unique cultures while respecting those of others. Italian-Americans have given a great deal to our Nation. And they've shown us the importance of preserving and creating opportunity for generations to come.

It's these values that I believe should guide all Americans without regard to party or position. I honestly believe the best days of this country lie before us. I believe there is no country in the world better positioned for the 21st century than we are. As we move from the cold war to the global—[*applause*]. Thank you. I'm glad you believe that. But we have to realize we're going through a period of more profound change in the way we work and live and relate to the rest of the world than perhaps in any time in a hundred years. And we have to be visionary about the future while holding fast to the values that got us where we are and make life worth living.

We are moving our economy forward. We've tried to address our most serious problems at home. We're trying to change the Government in a way that befits the 21st century. You might be interested to know that your Federal Government now has 163,000 fewer people working for it than it did the day I was inaugurated. I didn't know it until Laura Tyson told me last week, but she went back and checked. As a percentage of the civilian work force, the Federal Government is the smallest it has been since 1933. So the era of big Government is a big myth in that sense. We, too, have to become more productive. We, too, know we have to do more with less. But we also have to, together, continue to honor our basic values and pursue our common interests. We have to give our kids a better future. We have to give Americans a chance to make the most of their own lives and hold their families together.

We have to recognize that, as the Governor of Florida said the other day, we are, in fact,

a community, not a crowd. He said a crowd is a group of people that occupy the same piece of land but have no obligations to each other, so they just elbow one another until the strongest get ahead and the others fall behind. A community is a group of people that recognize that they will go forward or fall back together, that they have obligations to one another, and that they become better and fuller and richer by fulfilling those obligations.

You might be interested to know, and you might find it difficult to believe, but there is moving in America, in this big country that moves ever so slowly, a new spirit of community and family and personal responsibility. In almost every State the crime rate is down. In our Nation the welfare rolls are down, the food stamp rolls are down, the poverty rate is down, and the teen pregnancy rate is down now for 2 years in a row. Our country is beginning to move together and move forward.

What I want to say to you tonight is that I believe these decisions we are now making in Washington about the budget are not really about the budget. They must be about our basic values and what we imagine America should look like in the 21st century. And because we are changing so rapidly—frankly, no one can predict anyway what will be popular a month or 6 months or a year from now—we all have to try to imagine what we want America to look like 10 or 20 or 30 years from now.

My friend Cardinal Bernardin once said, "Families give life, and giving life means more than procreation. It means education and nurturing children to the full status as sons and daughters of God and citizens of their country and their world." The United Nations calls the family the smallest democracy at the heart of society. Where will new generations learn about democracy's rights and responsibilities if not at home? That is the question that we have to answer: What will the home of America be? What will our communities be? What will our families be? And I urge you, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, whether you live here or all the way across the country, whatever you do for a living, as we debate these great issues, imagine what you want America to look like for your children and your grandchildren. It's changing so fast you can't predict how it's going to look in a month or 6 months, in a year.

That is the context in which I hope this debate over the budget will play itself out. We all want a strong economy. We all want a strong America. To do it we have to have strong individuals, strong families, and strong communities.

I believe that the budget debate is not about balancing the budget. Everybody's for that. I couldn't believe what had happened to the debt when I came here. And we've taken the deficit from \$290 billion a year down to \$160 billion in just 3 years. I am proud of that. I think it's important and it matters. And every one of you, no matter what your party or political philosophy, should want us to finish that job. We should not leave this crushing burden of debt on our children. We should not take money away that is needed in our private sector to create jobs and invest and grow America and make us stronger. Everybody should be for it, but how we do it is a function of what we imagine our common responsibilities to be.

I believe we have to do it in a way that permits us to invest in education and invest in technology and invest in research, so that we can grow the economy and grow strong individuals. I believe we have to do it in a way that permits us to preserve the fundamental health care system that enables us to honor our responsibilities to our parents, to the disabled, to poor children. I believe we have to do it in a way that enables us to protect our natural environment and to recognize that there is a certain elemental sense of fairness that Americans always have, a certain compass that always guides us, and if we will hew to that and do what is common-sensical and consistent with our basic values, we will be fine.

I have done my best and will continue to do my best to move beyond traditional partisan politics at this very untraditional time, to work with the United States Congress to achieve a balanced budget in which all Americans can win. But I have to say, and I want you to know, I do not believe any major American company on the verge of the 21st century would cut its investment in education or research or technology, and I don't think we should either. I do not believe any family would willingly say that its poorest elderly members should be forced to pay for health care they cannot afford or its most vulnerable children should be put at risk of losing that health care. And I don't think we should either. I do not believe we should hamper our common responsibilities to

protect the environment of the United States or to work with other nations to secure the environment of the planet. I do not believe anybody would knowingly do that, and I don't think we should either.

I hope very much that we will see a coming together in this process. Everybody knows that the President under our Constitution has a veto and has to be prepared to use it. Everybody knows what the rules are in Congress. They're going to do what they're going to do, and if I have to use my veto pen, well, I'll do that. But in the end, what we need to do is to come together to build a stronger America, good for our children, good for our families, good for our communities.

You know, the lesson—I will just say this, and I want you to reflect on it—the ultimate lesson of what I saw in the faces of the thousands and thousands and thousands of African-American men who came here last week to march was people in a total spirit of reconciliation and personal atonement saying, “Yes, I do intend to take more responsibility for myself, for my family, and for my community. But I would like it very much if I do that”—[*applause*]*—*but the other message was, “I would like it very much if I do that, if you would reach out and join hands with me and help us solve our common problems and move our country forward together.”

That's why I said at the University of Texas something that I think Italian-Americans, especially who came here at a time when immigrants from Italy and Ireland were discriminated against, can identify with this. We still have too many people in America passing each other like ships in the night. I saw the other day an old book I had by Will Rogers. He said, for example, he said, “The Congress is someplace where somebody gets up and talks real loud, no one listens, and then everybody says they disagree.” [*Laughter*] Well, that's not just in Congress, and it's not just there. That happens in America, and it happens among people of different racial and ethnic groups.

And so I leave you with this challenge. I think we need, each of us as Americans, not only to value our own ethnic solidarity and our shared values but to share them with other people. We need to find somebody who is different from us and tell them what we really think for a change, even if it hurts. And then we need to have the discipline to listen to what

they say. And we need to work slowly to bridge these gaps in the way we view reality that have become so present and prevalent in our country.

I am telling you if you look at the facts, this country is better positioned for the 21st century than any country on Earth. Why? Because we're the most ethnically diverse, with the most flexible economy, with all these resources that God has given us and that our forebears have developed. We are well-positioned. We have to learn how to use—to make our diversity as an asset instead of letting it tear us apart. We have to relish in our diversity.

You're happy to be Italian here, but you're also proud to be Americans. We want everybody in America to feel that way, and we want everybody to feel that way about other groups as well. And we know if we do that we'll be all right.

So I say to you, I want you to think about this. Every time a decision is called upon to be made in this Nation's Capital or in your community, ask yourself what's it going to look

like in 20 years? What kind of America do I want my grandchildren to grow up in? Will we give people the right and the ability to make the most of their own lives? Will we help families become stronger? Will we be more of a community and less of a crowd? If the answer is yes, that's what we ought to do. And if we do it, you will be very proud of the America you leave to your children and your grandchildren, worthy of your Italian-American heritage.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Frank Guarini, president, Frank Stella, chairman, and Arthur Gajarsa, vice chairman, National Italian-American Foundation; singer Tony Bennett; former NFL football player Joe Montana; actor John Travolta; Gov. Lawton Chiles of Florida; Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua, Archbishop of Philadelphia; and Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago.

Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City *October 22, 1995*

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, distinguished guests. This week the United Nations is 50 years old. The dreams of its founders have not been fully realized, but its promise endures. The value of the United Nations can be seen the world over in the nourished bodies of once-starving children; in the full lives of those immunized against disease; in the eyes of students eager to learn; in the environment sustained, the refugees saved, the peace kept; and most recently, in standing up for the human rights and human possibilities of women and their children at the Beijing conference.

The United Nations is the product of faith and knowledge: Faith that different peoples can work together for tolerance, decency, and peace; knowledge that this faith will be forever tested by the forces of intolerance, depravity, and aggression. Now we must summon that faith and act on that knowledge to meet the challenges of a new era.

In the United States, some people ask, "Why should we bother with the U.N.? America is strong; we can go it alone." Well, we will act, if we have to, alone. But my fellow Americans should not forget that our values and our interests are also served by working with the U.N.

The U.N. helps the peacemakers, the care providers, the defenders of freedom and human rights, the architects of economic prosperity, and the protectors of our planet to spread the risk, share the burden, and increase the impact of our common efforts.

Last year I pledged that the United States would continue to contribute substantially to the U.N.'s finances. Historically, the United States has been, and today it remains, the largest contributor to the United Nations. But I am determined that we must fully meet our obligations, and I am working with our Congress on a plan to do so.

All who contribute to the U.N.'s work and care about its future must also be committed to reform, to ending bureaucratic inefficiencies